

**Submission  
No 146**

**INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF RENEWABLE ENERGY  
ZONES (REZ) ON RURAL AND REGIONAL  
COMMUNITIES AND INDUSTRIES IN NEW SOUTH  
WALES**

**Name:** Robyn and Bill Hicks

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## **To the Chair and members of the Legislative Council Inquiry into the Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales**

Thankyou for this enquiry. My name is Robyn Hicks and just over 4 weeks ago, my husband and I discovered that our small hobby farm acreage of approx 17 acres, on which I we have lived for 30 years, will be an adjacent neighbour to a proposed solar farm. At the same time as learning about this solar farm, we also discovered that our property lies in the Central West Orana Renewable Energy Zone.

It distresses us greatly that we didn't know that our property, located in the Wongarboon/Geurie area of NSW, actually falls in the CWO REZ. We had heard of the REZ on the news and in the newspapers but had thought it was located in the Wellington area as there have been wind and solar farms recently built there. Why have we never been infomed by the State Govt or by Dubbo Regional Council that our property lies in this zone? Not an email, letter or phone call. It's just that one day it was decided that the land that we purchased 30 years ago is now open to rampant abuse by large companies (not even Australian companies).

We understand councils are not considered stakeholders as REZ projects are State Significant however local councils can receive millions of dollars from the project developers. We find this completely unethical and consider it a bribe to remain quiet and not take a greater stance in supporting the landholders. Local councils should support and work for their residents and ratepayers, not major corporations.

We are only four weeks in to our fight and we have already spent countless hours researching other people in the same situation as ourselves, reading up on landholders objections to renewables being placed on perfectly viable agricultural land, understanding that this is splitting communities apart, pitting neighbours against each other and causing distress and anxiety on a large scale.

On 29th March this year we received a letter (which could have easily been mistaken as junk mail) from Venn Energy stating that our small hobby farm would be an adjacent neighbour to a proposed 3,500 acre solar farm. According to the letter, we had only a few days to obtain a face to face interview with Venn Energy and a mere 28 days to submit formal objections or ask questions. My husband and I were one of the lucky few neighbours who managed to get an interview. The interview was extremely unsatisfactory and the company was very unprofessional regarding answers to any of our questions or concerns, leaving us even more anxious.

Why did we only have 28 days to reply, make submissions or object? Who made this rule? Where is the governance? Where are the rules and the guidelines for Venn Energy in how they approach affected neighbours and deal with disputes? If they don't want us to know something they simply say "we are not at that point yet or it is confidential". Why as landowners did we have to get approval from Dubbo Regional Council to put up a 4 bay shed(that has no impact on neighbours and that no other neighbour can see from their house) and these energy companies seem to have open season on the land and how it will be used? We are being bullied, misinformed and having our concerns ignored by Venn Energy.

We are on a steep learning curve and have since discovered the severity of the problem regarding how many ongoing and proposed projects there are in the CWO region and over other areas of NSW. There seems to be no governance with regard to how many projects are in these REZ areas and no regulatory oversight.

I run a small business in Dubbo. I work 6 days per week in my business and my husband works full time. We are in our early 60's. Just a short four weeks ago, we were contemplating our retirement days and knowing that we could easily sell our small land holding and buy a nice house in Dubbo for our later years. We have since had our property valued and have been informed that we can expect at least 20% less now that a solar farm is being proposed to butt up against our boundaries.

It seems that the landholders are the last on the priority list of State Government and local councils. Who advocates for the landholders? Who advocates for the land and the environment? By rushing to a net zero emissions, we and our neighbours are a casualty.

We also hold concern for the neighbours who have signed agreements with the solar farm proponents. Are they aware of the implications of having this on their land and their children's land? Do they honestly think that this company will still be in business in 30 years time? Have the neighbours been fully informed of their obligations?

Why are these companies allowed to lease the land and not made to purchase the land which would make them custodians and responsible to future generations? By leasing land, these companies are avoiding taxes and rates and also giving them an easier exit strategy with no responsibility.

In the headlong rush to net zero emissions, the government and legislation makers have forgotten about their constituents and the landholders. How can we stand back and lose prime agricultural land to these projects? If Australians actually knew how much viable, productive land is being forever lost to these factories of energy (not farms), they would be disgusted.

In the case of Venn Energy, we have been informed that a decommissioning fund will not commence until 5 years before the end of the project operations. If this company disappears before then, who is left to clean up the mess?

We are in total and utter distress, everyday. This situation is causing stress on our bodies, our marriage, our small business and our mental wellbeing.

Please, can government support the landholders and do an immediate audit of all the state renewable projects that have been constructed and/or are proposed to be undertaken since the REZ area came into being?

Thankyou

Robyn and Bill Hicks